

ROYAL COMMISSIONS AS INSTRUMENTS OF POLICY-MAKING  
IN SASKATCHEWAN:  
THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON AGRICULTURE AND RURAL LIFE  
A CASE STUDY

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by

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## Abstract

Royal commissions as instruments of policy-making can look back to a long history. Traditionally they are used as advisory organizations. If composed of more than one commissioner they offer the possibility to study problems of any kind from different perspectives. In this lies one of their advantages vis-a-vis other advisory institutions - government bureaucracies and permanent advisory institutes, for example, at Canadian universities.

Despite these advantages royal commissions frequently are objects of criticism. It is often said that royal commissions are too expensive, that they are under control of the executive and that governments use this instrument to postpone decisions.

This thesis argues that royal commissions up to the present day are flexible instruments of policy-making especially vis-a-vis their alternatives. It will show in the case of the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life that royal commissions in general can be used as instruments to increase public participation and communication in addition to their traditional capacity as advisory organizations.

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## 1. Introduction

A royal commission of inquiry is an ad hoc advisory organization of one or more commissioners appointed to investigate, study, and report upon a matter of immediate concern<sup>1</sup>.

Royal commissions in Canada are a result of the British impact in Canadian politics. Many centuries before the founding of the Dominion of Canada, royal commissions had been a part of the English system of government<sup>2</sup>. According to the research of J.C. Courtney, the most commonly accepted date for the first royal commission appointed in the Dominion of Canada is the year 1870<sup>3</sup>. Since that time, royal commissions have frequently been used by governments at both levels of

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<sup>1</sup>John C. Courtney, Canadian Royal Commissions of Inquiry 1946 to 1962: An Investigation of an Executive Instrument of Inquiry (PhD Dissertation, Duke University, Michigan 1964), p. 14. (Hereafter cited as Courtney, Canadian Royal Commissions...).

<sup>2</sup>Hugh McDowall Clokie and J. William Robinson, Royal Commissions of Inquiry: The Significance of Investigations in British Politics (Stanford 1937), pp. 24 ff.

<sup>3</sup>Courtney, Canadian Royal Commissions..., p. 7.

the Canadian federal system.

In Britain the royal commission descends from the monarch's power to order investigations<sup>4</sup>. Although this formal status has also been preserved in Canada, the Parliament of the Dominion

has insisted on keeping a firmer rein on the executive prerogative by passing general legislation - the Public Inquiries Act - which established a framework of rules within which all royal commissions are required to operate<sup>5</sup>.

Consequently, in Canada, the Governor in Council appoints royal commissions under part I of the Public Inquiries Act. According to this act

the Governor in Council may, whenever the Governor in Council deems it expedient, cause inquiry to be made into and concerning any matter connected with the good government of Canada or the conduct of any part of the business therefore<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup>Paul Fox, "Royal Commissions" in James H. Marsh, ed., The Canadian Encyclopedia, second edition (Edmonton 1988), p. 1895.

<sup>5</sup>J. E. Hodgetts, "Should Canada Be De-Commissioned?," Queen's Quarterly LXX, no. 4 (Winter 1963), pp. 476. (Hereafter cited as Hodgetts, "Should Canada Be...").

<sup>6</sup>See: Canada, Inquiries Act, Revised Statutes of Canada 1985, chapt. I-11 (Ottawa 1985).



The provinces followed this example and enacted their own statutes for public inquiries. In Saskatchewan, the Lieutenant Governor's power to appoint royal commissions is formally embodied in the Saskatchewan Public Inquiries Act<sup>7</sup>. At both levels of the Canadian federal system, the statutes concerning public inquiry ascribe the power to order investigations to the monarch's representatives, but by convention these individuals act on the advice of the politically responsible executive<sup>8</sup>. At the national level as well as in the provinces the cabinet chooses the commissioners, decides the topic on which the commission is to undertake its investigation and determines the exact terms of reference.

Nevertheless, the wording of the Canada Inquiries Act as well as the wording of the statutes which provide the basis for public inquiries on the provincial level indicates two main characteristics of the royal commis-

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<sup>7</sup>See: Saskatchewan, Public Inquiries Act, Statutes of Saskatchewan (1981), chapt. P-38.

<sup>8</sup>See: Courtney, Canadian Royal Commissions..., p. 14.

sion's "technique" of policy-making<sup>9</sup>, that it is ad hoc and investigatory. Besides these features, royal commissions are also public, as will be seen in an analysis of the procedures and powers of this type of advisory organization.

Every royal commission has the power to summon witnesses and, if necessary, to compel them to give evidence under oath on the subject under investigation. In addition to this, royal commissions usually organize hearings within the boundaries of their jurisdiction, although they may be allowed to extend their inquiries beyond these boundaries<sup>10</sup>. Thus, during their investigations, they contact the public to gather information, and by so doing, they bring the issue under investigation to the public. In addition, it is common for a report of a royal commission to be published<sup>11</sup>. Hence, royal commissions fulfil an educational func-

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<sup>9</sup>I borrowed this phrase from G. Bruce Doern who used it in "The Role of Royal Commissions in the General Policy Process and in Federal-Provincial Relations," Canadian Public Administration 10, no. 4 (1967), pp. 417-433.

<sup>10</sup>For a more detailed description of the procedures and powers of royal commissions see: Courtney, Canadian Royal Commissions..., pp. 87-110.

<sup>11</sup>Kenneth Kernaghan and David Siegel, Public Administration in Canada (Toronto 1987), p. 232.

tion<sup>12</sup> in that they make the public aware of the problems related to the issue or issues under investigation and they provide the public with some necessary information to assess those problems. Therefore, the royal commission "technique" of policy-making is not only ad hoc and investigatory, but also public.

The structure of these advisory organizations offers the possibility of forming a committee of people with different backgrounds to investigate newly perceived problems and to discuss various solutions to these problems from different viewpoints<sup>13</sup>. Thus, royal commissions provide a real alternative to the established public service, since they offer recommendations reflecting different viewpoints, whereas the public service may produce reports which mirror the viewpoint of only one of its branches.

A British scholar, T.J. Cartwright, makes this point, when he says:

bureaucracy, in government and elsewhere, is essentially a structured set of responses to a number of preconceived challenges. In other words, bureaucracy

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<sup>12</sup>See: V.C. Fowke, "Royal Commissions and Canadian Agricultural Policy," The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science XIV, no. 2 (May 1948) p. 164; see, too, V. Seymour Wilson, Canadian Public Policy and Administration: Theory and Environment (Toronto 1981), p. 397.

<sup>13</sup>Robert J. Jackson, Doreen Jackson and Nicolas Baxter-Moore, Politics in Canada (Scarborough 1986), pp. 592-593.

is based on stereotypes. It is these assumptions about its environment that are in turn the basis for the success and efficiency of bureaucracies - but only as long as those assumptions conform to reality, only as long as the challenges a bureaucracy actually faces correspond to those it was designed to face. When that relationship changes, a bureaucracy's source of strength becomes a source of weakness<sup>14</sup>.

Thus the strength of royal commissions lies in their adaptability to new situations, since at any time it is possible to organize and appoint a commission suitable to investigate previously unexplored issues from different viewpoints.

Despite their positive features, royal commissions have frequently been objects of criticism in Canada as well as in Great Britain. In the view of Robert J. Jackson, and others, the establishment of a royal commission is often a "symbolic policy output", calculated to demonstrate the government's concern about a particular issue<sup>15</sup>. To emphasize their point, they say that royal commissions are often appointed when no clear policy output has been formulated, or when the government must be seen to be doing something about the

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<sup>14</sup>T.J. Cartwright, Royal Commissions and Departmental Committees in Britain: A Case-Study in Institutional Adaptiveness and Public Participation in Government (London 1975), p. 4.

<sup>15</sup>Jackson et al., pp. 592-593.

perceived problem. In this sense V.C. Fowke argues that royal commissions "serve a most useful function in permitting the formal expression of...[public]... protest"<sup>16</sup>. Governments hope by doing this to take the pressure off a particular issue or, as Harvey Mitchell phrases it, to put at ease those groups which are concerned about a certain problem<sup>17</sup>. V.C. Fowke labelled this response the "safety valve" function<sup>18</sup>. Other critics have referred to a related function of royal commissions: their use as "trial balloons" to sample public opinion in advance of introducing legislation<sup>19</sup>.

These criticisms are often associated with another charge - that governments influence the outcome of investigations of royal commissions through their power to choose the "right" commissioners for a particular

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<sup>16</sup>Fowke, p. 164.

<sup>17</sup>Harvey Mitchell, "To Commission-Or not to Commission: I. Introduction," Canadian Public Administration 5, no. 3 (1962), p. 255.

<sup>18</sup>Fowke, p. 164.

<sup>19</sup>J.E. Hodgetts, Royal Commissions of Inquiry in Canada: A Study in Investigative Technique, (unpublished M.A. Thesis, Toronto 1940) cited in Fowke, p. 164.

assignment<sup>20</sup>. W.R. Motherwell, Saskatchewan minister of agriculture from 1905 to 1918, once stated: "One commissioner, one master counsel and presto! you can get any kind of report you like"<sup>21</sup>. This criticism may be justified in part, but not to the extent implied, because after their appointment royal commissions are free in the conduct of their investigations<sup>22</sup>. Thus, the direct influence of governments on royal commissions ends once that commission is created; only in the pre-investigatory period is it possible for governments to exercise direct influence on royal commissions. Because of this, it is very likely that after its creation a royal commission may develop into a "ticking time bomb" for the cabinet<sup>23</sup>. Thus, the use of a royal commission as a "safety valve", a "trial balloon" or as a "symbolic policy output" is not without danger for the executive.

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<sup>20</sup>See: John C. Courtney, "In Defence of Royal Commissions," Canadian Public Administration 12, no. 2 (1969), pp. 208-210.

<sup>21</sup>Cited in Fowke, p. 164.

<sup>22</sup>See, Saskatchewan, Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, Report No. 1, (Regina 1955) pp. 5-7.

<sup>23</sup>See: Richard J. VanLoon and Michael S. Whittington, The Canadian Political System (Toronto 1987), p. 497.

The educational function of royal commissions, mentioned above, is also less straight forward than it appears. Critics say that royal commissions are used to generate pressure for intended policies, that the executive uses the royal commissions to influence both legislators and the public in a particular direction<sup>24</sup>. This criticism is again based on the assumption that governments have complete control over the appointed commissioners, while it does not pay enough respect to the fact that a royal commission is free in the conduct of its investigation after its appointment. This criticism also underestimates the "dynamic" character of public investigations of royal commissions. It does not pay enough attention to the fact that in addition to the flow of information from the commission to the public, there is also a flow of information the other way round - from the public to the commission.

Nevertheless, it is certainly true that the choice of the commissioners determines the direction in which the investigation goes and the degree to which public opinion will be taken into account during the investigations. But as the choice of the "right" commissioners may have an influence on the investigations in favour of the government, it can also have a positive

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<sup>24</sup>Fowke, p. 164 and Wilson, p. 397.

influence in terms of public participation. One could certainly increase the degree of public participation by appointing representatives of major interest groups closely related to the subject under investigation to serve on the royal commission.

Another criticism which is frequently voiced in the literature is that royal commissions are too expensive. According to J.E. Hodgetts and G. Bruce Doern, the reason for the excessive increase in the cost of royal commissions - in particular in the last four decades<sup>25</sup> - can be found in the fact that more and more royal commissions are dealing with recurring issues in their investigations<sup>26</sup>. According to Hodgetts and Doern recurring issues are those "of general social and cultural matters"<sup>27</sup>, which "are recurrent, if not per-

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<sup>25</sup>Courtney ascertains in his investigations a trend to bigger and more bureaucratized royal commissions since the Second World War, Canadian Royal Commissions ..., pp. 178-180.

<sup>26</sup>Hodgetts, "Should Canada Be ...," pp. 475- 490.; J.E. Hodgetts, "Public Power and Ivory Power" in Trevor Lloyd and Jack McLeod, eds., Agenda 1970: Proposal for a Creative Politics (Toronto 1968), pp. 271-280; J.E. Hodgetts, "Government Responsiveness to the Public Interests: Has Progress been Made?," Canadian Public Administration 24, no. 2 (1981) pp. 216-231 and Doern, pp. 417-433.

<sup>27</sup>Doern, p. 420.



manent, elements of the Canadian scene"<sup>28</sup>. Conversely, non-recurring issues are unique problems "that crop up as a result of an unexpected occurrence - a riot, fire, flood or landslide - or a particular crisis that may affect a ministry"<sup>29</sup>.

Hodgetts and Doern argue that with the growing complexity of Canadian society, governments are confronted more frequently with problems of a recurrent character and that consequently more often than in the past royal commissions are appointed to deal with those issues. To do justice to these new challenges royal commissions have hired more staff and require more expertise. Therefore, royal commissions have gotten bigger and consequently more expensive. Moreover, royal commissions have changed their character because of these developments. Doern and Hodgetts argue that the new form of royal commissions puts more emphasis on excessive studies and expertise than on public hearings. Furthermore, they point out that royal commissions, because of their ad hoc character, are not suitable to deal appropriately with problems of a recurring nature. Hodgetts states in this connection

...the recurrent problems are picked up de novo by each succeeding commission, there is little or no

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<sup>28</sup>Hodgetts, "Should Canada Be....," p. 479.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 478.

carry-over from one inquiry to another, research is duplicated and reports may repeat themselves<sup>30</sup>.

As a solution to these problems Doern and Hodgetts suggest that government should refer the recurring issues to advisory institutes of a permanent character (for example, at Canadian universities) and that they should appoint royal commissions only to deal with unique non-recurring problems.

It is doubtful, however, that ad hoc advisory organizations like royal commissions are less suited to deal with recurring problems than institutions of a permanent character created to deal with a particular set of recurring issues. As already mentioned, one of the advantages of royal commissions is the fact that they offer the possibility of forming a committee of people with different backgrounds to investigate perceived problems of any character. Because they are less likely to be composed of scholars from different disciplines or of representatives from different interest groups, permanent institutions are often too specialized to deal with complex socio-economic problems. Moreover, by organizing hearings and forums, royal commissions offer an opportunity to integrate the public into the investigative process. This is espe-

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 489.

cially important in dealing with such controversial problems in modern industrialized societies as, for example, environmental matters.

In the 1950s and 1960s in nearly all industrialized countries, major socio-economic change took place because of fast technological developments and urbanization. These developments created new demands on the societies as well as on their governments; in turn, this led to a permanent growth in number and size of governmental departments and administrative branches. The citizens in these societies are confronted with administrations which are constantly increasing in their complexity. This evolution has led to increased demands for more participation as well as an urgent need for more communication between the various societal groups and government<sup>31</sup>.

Royal commissions as well as other advisory institutions must be assessed against this background. It would not do justice to the potential of royal commissions to see them only as advisory organizations.

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<sup>31</sup>See, Ontario, Committee on Government Productivity, Interim Report No. 3 (Toronto 1972); Kenneth Bryden, "Cabinets" in David J. Bellamy, Jon H. Pammett, and Donald C. Rowat, eds., The Provincial Political Systems (Toronto 1976), pp. 310-322; Audrey Doerr, The Machinery of Government in Canada (Toronto 1981), pp. 1 ff.; Kernaghan and Siegel, p. 11 ff.

The advantage of royal commissions vis-a-vis permanent institutions of any kind is realized only if royal commissions are composed of more than one commissioner and if instruments like hearings, forums, and interviews are used during the investigations. If royal commissions are used only to produce reports based on outside expertise, then one must admit that there are better and probably cheaper ways to produce the same results.

An early example of the "new type" of royal commission which dealt with a recurrent and complex problem is the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, established in 1952 in response to two decades of sweeping socio-economic change in Saskatchewan. Few better illustrations than this exist in Canada of a royal commission performing both as a highly flexible policy instrument and as a mechanism to increase public participation and discussion between society's different groups and the government of that society.

The second chapter of this thesis begins with an introduction to the use made by earlier Saskatchewan governments of royal commissions as instruments of policy-making. This is followed by introducing information on the creation of the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life.

The third chapter examines the composition of the

Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life and discusses the problems related to interest group representation on royal commissions in general. The chapter argues that interest group representation on royal commissions can increase public participation and can contribute to the general acceptance of the royal commission by the public.

The fourth chapter deals with the organization and operation of the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life. It shows that the commission defined its role in two ways: first, as a traditional advisory organization and, secondly, as an instrument to increase public participation and communication. In addition, it examines those parts of the organization that reflect the emphasis on both roles.

The fifth chapter focuses on the second role of the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life. It shows how this commission used instruments such as forums, briefs and hearings during its investigation to increase public participation and communication. Furthermore, it examines several unusual activities of the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life after the submission of its reports, each of which contributed to stimulate public discussion about the complex problem which had originally prompted the creation of the commission.

## **2. Period of Transition: Background to the Creation of the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life in Saskatchewan**

From the province's creation in 1905, Saskatchewan governments made extensive use of royal commissions; this was true regardless of which party was in power. As the list of royal commissions in Table 1 reveals, agriculture and natural resources were predominant concerns of these commissions. To this degree, the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life fell in the provincial tradition, but in other respects it was exceptional. First, it was the largest commission in Saskatchewan's history up to the date it was appointed and, secondly, after the completion of its work no other commission of similar scope was ever appointed again. Instead, Saskatchewan governments appointed royal commissions which were up to the 1980s relatively small in size and which dealt with unique non-recurring problems. As a result, Saskatchewan does not bear out the trend mentioned by Doern and Hodgetts (and described in chapter 1) - that today royal commissions more often deal with recurring problems than in the past.

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Table 1: Royal Commissions<sup>32</sup> in Saskatchewan,  
1905-1985

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Year*	Royal Commission	Number of Commissioners
1907	Municipal System of the Province of Saskatchewan	5
1910	Elevator Commission	3
1913	Agricultural Credit Commission	3
1914	Grain Markets Commission	3
1915	Live Stock Commission	3
1915	Farm Machinery Commission	5
1915	Commission on Agricultural and Industrial Education	5
1917	Live Stock Commission	5
1921	Better Farming Commission	4
1922	Saskatchewan Anti-Tuberculosis Commission	3
1928	Saskatchewan Power Resource Commission	3
1929	Workmen's Compensation Commission	5
1929	Grain Inquiry Commission	3
1930	Public Service Inquiry Commission	3
1930	Immigration and Settlement	5
1931	Inquiry into Statements Made into Statutory Declarations and Other Matters	3
1934	Milk Inquiry Commission	1
1935	Coal Mining Industry Commission	1
1936	Taxation Commission	5
1938	Advisability of Providing Standard Forms	1
1943	Commission on Employer-Employee Relations	2
1944	Health Service Survey Commission	1
1946	Commission on Little Manitou Lake	4
1947	Commission on Forestry	5
1947	Commission on Fisheries	5
1947	Saskatchewan Penal Commission	3
1950	Coal Industry Commission	3
1953	Public Accountancy Commission	3

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<sup>32</sup>This list includes commissions appointed under the Public Inquiries Act of Saskatchewan.

1954	Agriculture and Rural Life	6
1958	Certain Mineral Transactions	3
1963	Mechanics' Lien	1
1963	Hospital Staff Appointments	1
1965	Government Administration	3
1965	Commission on Taxation	3
1966	Public Accountancy Commission	3
1966	Surface Rights and Pipeline Easements	1
1967	Library Inquiry Committee	3
1973	University Organization and Structure	3
1977	Wilderness Challenge Camps	1
1978	Cluff Lake Board of Inquiry	3
1981+	Committee to Review Library Legislation	8
1982	The Culliton Commission	1
1982	Crown Investment Review Commission	7
1984	Local Government Finance Commission	8
1984	Sale of Saskatchewan Government Insurance Properties	1
1985	Commercial Bingo Operation in Saskatchewan	3

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\* The year refers to the date of the publication of the of the first report of the royal commissions.

+ The year refers to the date of the appointment of the royal commission

Sources: Maillet, Lise, Provincial Royal Commissions and Commissions of Inquiry, 1867-1982: A Selected Bibliography (Ottawa 1986) and The Saskatchewan Gazette, 76, no. 1 (Regina 1980) to 81, no. 52 (Regina 1985).

The distinctiveness of the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life arose from its timing: the previous two decades had marked a period of rapid transition for Saskatchewan's agricultural economy and rural life. The commission was appointed to deal with the multiple and diverse problems which occurred



because of these changes.

After the Second World War, farm mechanization accelerated (see Table 2) because the farm machinery industry was able to turn to full peacetime production.

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Table 2: Farm Machinery in Saskatchewan, 1941-1951

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Machine	1941	1946	1951
Automobiles	55,767	57,326	60,916
Tractors	51,353	66,218	90,307
Gasoline engines (stationary)	27,935	34,662	41,630
Motor trucks	20,225	26,674	49,277
Grain combines	10,822	21,851	41,215
Electric motors	1,267	3,761	6,877

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Source: Saskatchewan Economic Advisory & Planning Board, Saskatchewan Economic Review (March 1962) no. 16, p. 6.

The number of tractors used on Saskatchewan's farms increased more than 75 per cent from 51,353 in 1941 to 90,307 in 1951. The number of grain combines expanded in the same period by nearly 400 per cent and that of

motor trucks 150 per cent. These and the other figures listed in Table 2 indicate the degree to which mechanization in the Saskatchewan agricultural industry took place during the 1940s and 1950s. This in turn had a major impact on the economic and social life of the province.

As can be seen in Table 3 the average farm size in Saskatchewan had steadily increased since the creation of the province<sup>33</sup>. In order to use the new machinery more economically after 1945, farmers were forced to extend their farmland even more rapidly.

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<sup>33</sup>John H. Archer, Saskatchewan: A History (Saskatoon 1980), p. 270.

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Table 3: Number and Size of Saskatchewan's Farms  
1931-1961

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	1931	1941	1951	1961
No. of farms	136,472	138,713	122,018	93,924
Average farm size in acres	407,9	432,3	550,5	685,8

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Source: Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture,  
Agricultural Statistics 1975, (Regina 1975), p. 1.

The average size of a Saskatchewan farm expanded from 1941 to 1951 from 432 to 550 acres, while in the same period the number of farms decreased from 138,713 to 112,018. Other changes in the agricultural economy and rural life occurred as a result of these developments: first, the additional land required to make mechanical agriculture profitable was purchased from other farmers, a fact which led to increasing competition among the farmers; secondly, farming in Saskatchewan grew more expensive. The total costs per farm increased more than 200 per cent between 1941 and 1951. This can be put down to the fact that during this period machinery expenses in particular enlarged

significantly as demonstrated in Table 4:

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Table 4: Costs per Farm, 1931-1953<sup>34</sup>

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Year	Total Costs	Hired Labour		Machinery Expenses	
	\$	\$	%	\$	%
1931	857	119	14	142	16
1936	811	93	11	148	18
1941	833	107	13	193	23
1946	1,467	171	12	418	28
1951	2,615	273	10	689	26
1953	3,022	312	10	870	29

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Source: Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, Report No. 2 (Regina 1955), p. 152.

As a result of the rising capital investment it became more difficult for young people and newcomers to enter the agriculture industry; this was true even though farm income increased dramatically from 1946 to 1952, as indicated in Table 5:

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<sup>34</sup>This Table includes a selection of the total costs (machinery expenses / hired labour) to stress the point that after 1946 the percentage of the machinery costs increased significantly, whereas during the same period the percentage of hired labour decreased.

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Table 5: Net Farm Income Per Farm Operator,  
Saskatchewan, 1936-1952

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Year	Net Farm Income Per Farm Operator
1936	\$ 79
1941	\$ 505
1946	\$ 1,702
1947	\$ 2,040
1948	\$ 3,132
1949	\$ 3,280
1950	\$ 2,349
1951	\$ 4,936
1952	\$ 5,169

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Source: Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, Report No. 7 (Regina 1956), p. 6.

Mechanization explains the tremendous increase in farm income, for it led to a rise in productivity at the same time that it reduced labour costs. Nevertheless, high operating costs and a decline in farm-related jobs forced people to leave Saskatchewan's rural areas and to seek their fortune elsewhere.

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Table 6: Migration of People in Rural Areas in  
Saskatchewan, 1936-1951

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Years	total	into Sask. cities
1936-41	-50,428	14,873
1941-46	-84,918	21,614
1946-51	-83,170	82,210

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Source: Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan,  
Debates and Proceedings, Official Report 5,  
no. 26 (March 14, 1952), p. 6.

Migration of the rural population accelerated the decline of rural communities already hard hit by drought and depression<sup>35</sup>. This response induced many farmers who remained on the land to move to the nearest town and to use their farms for working purposes only. As a result, the old rural predominance of Saskatchewan's population grew less marked.

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<sup>35</sup>Archer, pp. 213-246 and Gerry Fairbairn, From Prairie Roots: The Remarkable Story of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, (Saskatoon 1984), p. 112-140.

Table 7: Rural/Urban Population Trends in  
Saskatchewan

Year	Pop. Total	Rural Total	per cent	Urban Total	per cent
1901	91,279	82,853	90,8	8,426	9,2
1911	492,432	399,037	81,0	93,359	19,0
1921	757,510	629,888	83,2	127,622	16,8
1931	921,785	734,644	79,7	187,121	20,3
1941	895,992	705,254	78,7	190,738	21,3
1951	831,728	579,258	69,9	252,470	30,4
1961	925,181	527,090	57,0	398,091	43,0

Source: John H. Archer, Saskatchewan: A History, (Saskatoon 1980), p. 360.

Depopulation had a major impact on social life in rural areas. This trend not only had an impact on society - destroying whole rural communities and forcing those left behind to integrate themselves in new communities - but it directly affected the personal life of families. "Greater mobility of farm families, movement of farm families to urban centers, and in-

creased opportunities of recreation and community work outside the home,... encouraged individual rather than family activities"<sup>36</sup>. The biggest casualty of these changes was the former dichotomy between urban and rural population: the new mobility of rural population ended the isolation of farm life<sup>37</sup>.

Thus, in the decade from 1940 to 1950 mechanization of agriculture led to major economic and social changes in Saskatchewan and in particular in the rural areas of the province. It also led to new demands on the government: not only was the changing economy creating new challenges for the politicians, but so too was the rapidly shifting social structure. The latter was probably even a greater challenge for the government.

In response to these new challenges, the CCF government appointed a royal commission to investigate the state of agriculture and rural life. On March 14th, 1952, Premier T.C. Douglas moved, and the Legislative

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<sup>36</sup>Royal Commission of Agriculture and Rural Life, Report No. 14 (Regina 1957), p. 23.

<sup>37</sup>For an illustration of the changes in rural life encouraged by mechanization during the 1940s and 1950s in Saskatchewan, Reports Nos. 2-14 of the Royal Commission of Agriculture and Rural Life are very valuable sources.



Assembly passed, the following motion<sup>38</sup>

This Assembly... agrees it is advisable that the Provincial Government should appoint a Royal Commission to investigate and make recommendations regarding the requirements for the maintenance of a sound farm economy and the improvement of social conditions and amenities in rural Saskatchewan, and recommends that such commission, in its inquiry and recommendations, have particular reference to:

- (1) the problems involved in the present day trends in agriculture production, land use and farm costs;
- (2) the need for farm capital and credit;
- (3) the further adaptation of social services and educational facilities to meet changing rural conditions; and
- (4) the further development of rural transportation, communication and community services<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup>See: Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, Debates and Proceedings, Official Report 5, no. 26 (March 14, 1952), pp. 1 ff.

<sup>39</sup>Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Saskatchewan, Second Session 1951 (Regina 1951), pp. 102-103.

In summary we can ascertain that the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life had to deal with complex socio-economic problems which were engendered due to the rapid mechanization of the agriculture industry after the Second World War. Thus the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life is a perfect example of the new type of royal commission recognized by Doern and Hodgetts.

### 3. The Creation of the Commission

The Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life consisted of six commissioners, who together possessed both practical and scientific expertise on rural and agriculture matters. The following profiles indicate that the government chose as commissioners leading persons of the most important farm and rural organizations in the province as well as individuals of demonstrated scholarly capacity.

The chairman of the commission was the Director of the School of Agriculture at the University of Saskatchewan, Professor William B. Baker<sup>40</sup>. Among his extensive qualifications for the position, Baker was a member of the Institute of Agrologists, the Agricultural Institute of Canada, the American Rural Sociology Society, the American Society for Study of Social Problems, the Council of the Canadian Association for Adult Education, and the Scientific Planning Committee of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Saskatchewan

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<sup>40</sup>See, (Regina) Leader Post, "Commissioners know farming," Oct. 4, 1952, p. 3; see, too, Michael Hayden, Seeking a Balance: The University of Saskatchewan 1907-1982 (Vancouver 1983), p. 219.

Division<sup>41</sup>. As well, he concentrated his scientific research on agricultural organization and rural sociology.

Another member of the commission was Joseph L. Phelps, of Wilkie, a former Minister of Natural Resources and Industrial Development in the CCF government<sup>42</sup>. At the time he was appointed, Phelps was the President of one of the most important farm organizations in Saskatchewan - the Saskatchewan Farmers' Union<sup>43</sup> - which counted a membership of 72,401 by the time he left office in 1954<sup>44</sup>.

Furthermore, in recognition of the prominent role co-operatives had played in Saskatchewan's development, the government appointed the following three leading activists of the Saskatchewan co-operative movement to serve on the commission: Charles W. Gibbins, Henry

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<sup>41</sup>See, (Saskatoon) Star Phoenix, "Royal Commission on Agriculture, Rural Life Named; Baker Heads Group to Blueprint Future Development", Oct. 3, 1952, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup>See, J.F.C. Wright, Saskatchewan: The History of a Province (Canada 1955), pp. 270-272.

<sup>43</sup>For the development of the Saskatchewan Farmers' Union, see, James N. McCrorie, In Union is Strength (Saskatoon 1964).

<sup>44</sup>Fairbairn, p. 186.

("Harry") L. Fowler, and Tabaldo H. Bourrassa.

The history of the co-operative movement in Saskatchewan is older than that of the province itself<sup>45</sup>. The pioneers of the West were dependent on the "outside" world in two different ways. First, because most of the new settlers in the Saskatchewan region earned their living by growing and selling wheat, they depended on the people who controlled the facilities necessary to carry their products to market and on those companies which controlled the intermediate trade between the farmers and the consumers. Secondly, because of the relatively poor supply network at the beginning of this century, the farmers were also dependent on only a few companies and local merchants who supplied them with the necessary goods for living. Unhappy experiences with middlemen both in the wheat trade and as suppliers of goods encouraged the farmers to develop their own organizations to deal with those matters.

Co-operatives are controlled by their members and the gains of the co-operatives are distributed to the members in proportion to the use they make of the ser-

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<sup>45</sup>See, E. Forrest Scharf, Co-operatives in Saskatchewan (Saskatoon 1959), pp. 21 ff; see also, Ian MacPhearson, The Co-operative Movement on the Prairies, 1900-1955 (Ottawa 1979).

vice. Today, "marketing" co-operatives and "consumer" or "purchasing" co-operatives constitute two of the four major categories of co-operatives<sup>46</sup>. In 1952, at the time the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life was created, the total membership of all co-operatives in Saskatchewan was 392,629<sup>47</sup>.

Charles W. Gibbins was a member of the board of directors of the biggest marketing co-operative in Saskatchewan - the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool<sup>48</sup>. Founded in 1923 primarily to collect and market grain, the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool had grown by the 1950s into a complex organization with a number of special divisions including one devoted to livestock and another to printing and publishing. Since communication was a strong principle among co-operatives, the Pool had its own weekly newspaper - the Western Producer - as well as a group of special fieldmen to inform and maintain

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<sup>46</sup>See, Scharf, pp. 27 ff.

<sup>47</sup>J.E. O'Meara, Co-operation in Canada 1952, Twenty-first Annual Summary (Ottawa 1953), p. 2.

<sup>48</sup>For the creation and development of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool see, Fairbairn. Charles W. Gibbins had entered the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool in 1946. Six years later he was a member of the board of directors, in 1955 he became vice-president of the Pool and in 1960 president.

contact with Pool members<sup>49</sup>.

Besides his activities in the Wheat Pool Gibbins also farmed in Rosetown. His agricultural connections did not end there, for after receiving a university degree in agriculture in 1942, he had served as a youth training instructor and as a teacher at the University of Saskatchewan agriculture school<sup>50</sup>.

Another commissioner and activist in the Saskatchewan co-operative movement was Henry ("Harry") L. Fowler, at this time secretary of the biggest consumer co-operative in Saskatchewan - the Saskatchewan Federated Co-operatives Ltd<sup>51</sup>. In addition to his work with the Saskatchewan Federated Co-operatives, Fowler was also active in numerous other co-operatives and occupied various important positions in those organizations, as listed in Table 8:

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<sup>49</sup>See, Scharf, pp. 36 ff.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>For more information on this organization see: Scharf, pp. 45 ff.

Table 8: Co-operative Organizations identified with  
H.L. Fowler

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Wilcox Co-operative Ass'n	X				X	X
Sherwood Credit Union	X	X				
Regina Co-operative Ass'n			X	X		
Consumer Co-op Refineries	X	X	X	X	X	X
Can. Co-op Implements	X	X	X	X		
National Farm Mach. Co-op			X			X
Interprovincial Co-op	X	X	X	X		
Sask. Co-op Credit Society	X	X	X	X		
Co-op Trust Company	X	X	X	X	X	X
Federated Co-ops			X	X	X	
Co-op Fidelity Company	X	X	X	X		
Federated Agencies Ltd.	X	X	X	X		
Funeral Co-op Ass'n	X	X	X	X		
Publications Co-op Ass'n	X	X	X			
Co-op Union of Sask.	X		X	X		
Co-op Fisheries Ltd.			X			
Tisdale Co-op Ass'n						X
Medical Co-op Regina	X	X	X			
Community Health Ass'n	X	X				

1 = Assistant Organizer / 2 = Original Incorporator  
 3 = Director / 4 = President / 5 = Secretary /  
 6 = Manager

Source: Terry Phalen, Co-operative Leadership: Harry L. Fowler, (Saskatoon 1977), p. 76.



According to Terry Phalen, who wrote Henry Fowler's biography,

H.L. Fowler is one of a number of distinguished agrarian and co-operative leaders who, from the earliest days of agricultural settlement, helped to make the co-operative movement a major factor in the history of Prairie Canada and a major force in improving the economic and social conditions of its people<sup>52</sup>.

This citation sums up the role which Harry Fowler played in the Saskatchewan co-operative movement.

Tabaldo H. Bourassa, of Lafleche, the third and last mentioned co-operative leader who served on the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, was one of the founding fathers of the Credit Unions in Saskatchewan.

A credit union is a mutual self-help association operating on behalf of its members in the field of finance. Its purposes are to provide a medium wherein the member may make regular systematic savings and thus build up a pool of funds from which the member secure loans for provident or productive purposes. Its aim is to provide service at cost in the finance field to members only<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup>Terry Phalen, Co-operative Leadership: Harry L. Fowler (Saskatoon 1977), p. 71.

<sup>53</sup>Scharf, p. 61.

In comparison to the other types of co-operatives mentioned above, the Credit Union in the 1950s was a relatively new phenomenon in Saskatchewan. The province's first Credit Union was created in the second half of the 1930s in the small town of Lafleche, and T.H. Bourassa was one of its initiators and founding fathers<sup>54</sup>. The Lafleche Credit Union quickly developed as a model for all other credit unions later created in Saskatchewan. Links between the new credit unions and the older producer and consumer co-operatives were forged in 1941 through the Co-operative Credit Society Act, "which provided that all credit unions registered under the Credit Union Act and all co-operative organizations incorporated under the Co-operative Association Act could become members of the... [Saskatchewan Co-op Credit]... Society"<sup>55</sup>.

T.H. Bourassa was again one of the first members of the board of directors of this Credit Society, a position he held until 1950<sup>56</sup>. This society functions

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<sup>54</sup>See, Muriel Clements, By Their Bootstraps: A History of the Credit Union Movement in Saskatchewan (Toronto 1965), pp. 58 ff.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid, p. 178.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 179; See, too, G.V. Wade, ed., Who's Who in Saskatchewan: A Biographical Directory (Saskatoon 1956), p. 41.

as a central deposit and lending agency for credit unions and co-operatives in the province<sup>57</sup>. From 1939 to 1949, he also served as a director of the Credit Union League<sup>58</sup>, which is the educational branch of the credit union movement. Practically all credit unions in Saskatchewan are members of the Credit Union League, which "not only provides education and public relation services but also gives service in the bonding and supply fields"<sup>59</sup>.

In addition to his activities in the credit union, Bourassa was president of the United Merchants (1926-1929), secretary of the Farm Improvement Association (1935-40), a member of the town council of Lafleche (1917-1927) and chairman of the School Board (1920-1930). He also had a degree in economics and, after 1949, he had earned his living in the real estate and insurance business<sup>60</sup>.

With the appointment of the sixth member of the commission, Nancy Adams of Ethelton, the government

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<sup>57</sup>See: Scharf, p. 64.

<sup>58</sup>Wade, p. 41.

<sup>59</sup>Scharf, p. 65.

<sup>60</sup>Wade, pp. 41-42.

secured someone who knew areas so far underrepresented by the commissioners. She was not only the past president of the Saskatchewan Homemakers' Club<sup>61</sup>, an organization which deals with welfare, education and social life in rural areas, but she was also active in other key organizations, as a member of the executive committee of the Canadian Association for Adult Education, as assistant Sunday School superintendent and as first vice-president of the Federated Women's Institute of Canada<sup>62</sup>. A graduate of the University of Saskatchewan with a major in English and French, Adams was married to a farmer and had taught at various rural locations in the province<sup>63</sup>.

In summary, the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life comprised both practical and scholarly

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<sup>61</sup>Mrs. Nancy Adams was president of the Saskatchewan Homemakers' Club from 1948 to 1951. The Club was founded in 1911 with the assistance of the University of Saskatchewan through its extension work. In 1937 there existed 367 clubs with 7,350 members. See, G.E. Britnell, The Wheat Economy (Toronto 1939), p. 121; Arthur S. Morton, Saskatchewan: The Making of a University (Toronto 1959), pp. 88-90 and Hayden, pp. 123-124.

<sup>62</sup>Saskatoon Star Phoenix, "Royal Commission on Agriculture, Rural Life Named; Baker Heads Group to Blueprint Future Development", Oct. 3, 1952, p. 3.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*

experts representing those parts of the population in Saskatchewan that would be most affected by the investigation and recommendations of the commission.

Nevertheless, the fact that the co-operative movement was closely linked to the CCF<sup>64</sup> and that Phelps was a former minister in the CCF government could cause ground for complaint that at least four of the six commissioners were sympathetic towards the CCF government. Thus, there is room for criticism that the CCF government chose at least four of the six commissioners according to the principle mentioned in the introduction: "One commissioner, one master counsel, and presto! you can get any kind of report you like".

The party affiliation of commissioners is certainly a point which one has to take into account when judging a royal commission, but the occupational background of the commissioners and their involvement in interest

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<sup>64</sup> First, the CCF in Saskatchewan was largely created by the co-operators of the province. Secondly, the CCF-government always tried to keep a close relationship to the co-operatives. The CCF-government, for example, established the first co-operative department in which the economic development plans of the government and the co-operatives were to be coordinated. Moreover, many of the CCF MLA's were leaders in the co-operative movement. See, C.H. Higginbotham, Off the Record: The CCF in Saskatchewan (Toronto 1968), pp. 59-60; George Cadbury, "Planning in Saskatchewan," in Laurier LaPierre et al., eds., Essays on the Left (Toronto 1971), p. 59.

groups affected by the issue or issues under investigation are equally or more important considerations. A royal commission is, after all, still an investigatory body in which expert knowledge is essential. Moreover, greater participation by the population in the work of the commission might be expected to follow the appointment of representatives of affected interest groups. Finally, both expert knowledge and interest group representation can also increase the general acceptance of a royal commission by the public and can increase the support of the work of the commission by the people. Each of these considerations contributes to the general success of a commission.

However, in connection with interest group representation on royal commissions, it is often argued that it is very dangerous to make the commissions too representative. The commission hearings can easily turn into a debate between the commissioners, which in turn makes it difficult to get a unanimous report from such a commission<sup>65</sup>.

This criticism has also been directed at parliamentary task forces, first created at the beginning of the 1980s. Like royal commissions the task forces are

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<sup>65</sup>See, Courtney, Canadian Royal Commissions...., pp. 51-52; Clokie and Robinson, pp. 158-159.

way.

Moreover, interest group representation on royal commissions does not necessarily mean the representation of conflicting interest. The issue under investigation will determine whether there are representatives of interest groups with contrary goals on the commission or not, as we can see on the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life. In this case the goals of the interest groups represented by the commissioners certainly were more homogeneous than otherwise.

#### 4. The Goals of the Commission

At both levels of the Canadian federal system royal commissions are usually established by Order-in-Council<sup>68</sup>. The Orders-in-Council establishing royal commissions include the terms of reference, which are in effect its "marching orders". Within the framework of these marching orders the commissioners have the power to decide what kind of investigations are necessary or expedient to fulfil their task, as long as they do not in the process exceed their mandate by changing the "nature" of the terms of reference<sup>69</sup>.

The Royal Commission on Agricultural and Rural Life was established by Order-in-Council No. 2442/52 on October 31, 1952<sup>70</sup>. The terms of reference echoed those recommended by the Legislative Assembly in its resolution of March 17, 1952 (see above page 26). The commissioners, however, exercised their discretion over the

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<sup>68</sup>Russell J. Anthony and Alastair R. Lucas, A Handbook on the Conduct of Public Inquiries in Canada (Toronto 1985), p. 11.

<sup>69</sup>Courtney, Canadian Royal Commission..., pp. 111-113.

<sup>70</sup>Cited in Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, Report No. 1 (Regina 1955), p. V.



scope of the investigation to widen its already broad terms of reference. They laid down their own task as follows:

(1) to search out and organize the fullest possible set of facts relevant to Saskatchewan's complex rural economic and social conditions; [and]

(2) on the basis of these facts, to establish guides for future rural improvement"<sup>71</sup>.

Thus, the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life wanted to establish guidelines for rural improvement based on the broadest possible range of information. Therefore the first step was to define rural improvement and its determining factors. The commission was well aware of the fact that by defining rural improvement and its determining factors they would make a decision about the sources which should be used for fact gathering<sup>72</sup>. The selection of sources influences the nature of the facts gathered; the facts in turn serve as a basis for the formulation of the recommendations. Therefore, the course of the whole investigation and its outcome hinged upon the definition of rural improvement.

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<sup>71</sup>Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, Report No. 14, p. 2.

<sup>72</sup>Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, Report No. 1, pp. 9 ff.

The commission defined rural improvement as the process of making things better than they were before. It recognized, however, that improvement can be materialistic or non-materialistic in character<sup>73</sup>.

The socio-economic changes that followed the introduction of mechanization had positive as well as negative materialistic and non-materialistic impacts on different individuals and groups in the society. For example, for one part of the population these changes had a positive impact in terms of materialistic values because they could expand their farms, buy new equipment, and increase their standard of living. At the same time another part of the population got lost in the competition. They were forced to sell their farms and to seek their fortune elsewhere. Similarly, mechanization had increased the general standard of living, while it had destroyed much of the rural community. The consequent reconstruction of rural life forced one part of the population to adapt to a more urbanized style of life, whereas another part of the population (those who remained on the land) benefited from the abolition of rural isolation. These examples show that the problems related to rural improvement can be interpreted from different viewpoints.

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., pp. 9-10.

Thus one of the basic questions underlying the definition of rural improvement was: What can be seen as better than before? Is rural improvement the same as development towards a generally higher living standard based on material values estimated by per capita income statistics, for example; or does one have to measure the "improvement" in terms of social values and find indicators for them? These questions basically sum up the broad spectrum of problems which the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life had to face in defining rural improvement and its indices.

In its attempt to find answers to these questions the commission intended as much as possible to involve different organizations as well as individuals in its fact gathering process and in its selection of problems for concentrated studies. Because of the complexity and interdependence of rural problems, the commission also saw the absolute necessity to add scholarly knowledge to knowledge born of experience. Thus, the commissioners decided to tap two main types of information: first, that based on the practical experience of the public and, secondly, expert knowledge or - as the commission called it - technical information<sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>74</sup>Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, Report No. 14, p. 2.

Both sources were used to determine the major fields for the commission's study and the investigative perspective to be adopted for each field. With the benefit of this approach the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life ultimately produced the following twelve research reports (Reports Nos. 2-13):

- (2) Mechanization and farm costs
- (3) Agriculture credit
- (4) Rural roads and local government
- (5) Land tenure
- (6) Rural education
- (7) Movement of farm people
- (8) Agriculture market and prices
- (9) Crop insurance
- (10) The home and family in rural Saskatchewan
- (11) Farm electrification
- (12) Service centers
- (13) Farm income

The commission was convinced that rural improvement could only be achieved with the help of a critical public aware of the different problems connected to rural improvement and willing to think about solutions whose effects extended beyond benefiting their own interests. Therefore, the commission wanted to stimulate public interest in the problems related to rural improvement and to provide the public with the knowledge necessary for a critical reflection of its own situation. Moreover, it intended to promote public communication, since it believed that the sensitivity

necessary for the development of satisfying solutions for rural improvement could only be achieved through intensive public discussion. The commission stated its philosophy on communication as follows:

Long term rural improvement involves changes which are neither sudden nor simple. No matter how much knowledge is brought to bear on rural problems, or how great the material resources may be, improvement will not be possible unless ideas are communicated so that they become common property. Perhaps it would be accurate to say that the basic tool of rural improvement is communication. Whether communication involves reading a report, discussion around a table, or commentaries of press and radio, there must be achieved a communication of understanding before there will be agreement on the direction which improvement is to take. It is in the free flow and conflict of ideas that the understanding and tolerance develop which are necessary for progress towards the goal of happy and satisfied people<sup>75</sup>.

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that the goals of the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life were twofold:

- (1) to establish guidelines for rural improvement on the broadest possible basis of information, and
- (2) to increase the participation of and communication with the public to solve problems connected with rural improvement.

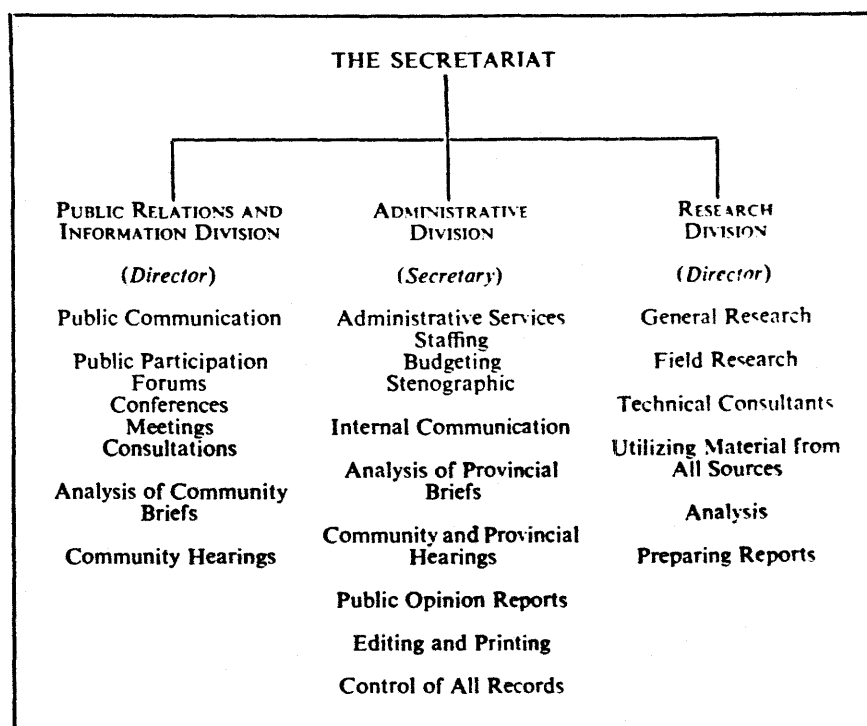
This twofold definition of its own role was reflected in the structure of the commission's secreta-

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<sup>75</sup>Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, Report No. 1, p. 13.

riat depicted in the following chart. In addition to an administrative division, the secretariat included, as well, divisions directed to research, public relations and information.

Chart 1: Organization of the Secretariat



Source: Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, Report No. 1, p. 17.

The emphasis on participation and communication, in addition to the traditional function of a royal commission as an advisory organization, was also revealed by one of the commission's first acts: to

establish good relations with the media. Without the help of the press and radio, the increased communications the commission sought with the public would not be possible. Just one week after its first meeting on October 15, 1952<sup>76</sup> the commission called a press conference

- (1) to discuss the terms of reference and plan of operation of the commission;
- (2) to discuss means by which the commission could aid in preparing information for press and radio; and
- (3) to discuss means by which press and radio could aid the Commission in securing broad public participation<sup>77</sup>.

Twenty-three persons representing seventeen different newspapers and radio stations accepted the invitation of the commission. One of the major outcomes of the conference was the appointment of a press representative to maintain the communication lines between the media and the commission. That this effort to establish good relations with the media paid off is indicated by the fact that Saskatchewan's main newspap-

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<sup>76</sup>While the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life was officially established by Order-in-Council on October 31, 1952, it already began to start its business earlier in the month.

<sup>77</sup>Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, Report No. 1, p. 22.

ers published during the period from 1952 to 1959 about 450 articles on subjects related to the commission's work<sup>78</sup>. This broad news coverage certainly contributed to the success of the forums and hearings organized by the commission; as well it stimulated public interest in problems related to rural improvement.

In summary we can ascertain that the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life defined its role as twofold: First, in its traditional capacity as an advisory organization and, secondly, as an instrument to increase public participation and communication. In turn this twofold role is reflected in its organizational structure as well as in its relationship to the media.

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<sup>78</sup>See, Legislative Library, Newspaper Index Covering in General the Period 1949-1954 III, pp. 804-811 and Newspaper Index Covering in General the Period 1955-59 II, pp. 529-531.



## 5. The Involvement of the Public

The previous chapter has shown that the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life wanted to base its study on two types of information: first, expert knowledge, and secondly, information based on public experience. To this end the commission tapped the following five sources (the list also includes the methods used by the commission).

(1) Groups of people in rural communities (through community forums, briefs and hearings);

(2) Groups of people and officials in provincial organizations (through provincial conferences, briefs and hearings);

(3) Individuals and key officials in rural communities (through personal interviews and questionnaire);

(4) Technicians with specialized experience (through consultation);

(5) General information (through study of relevant published and unpublished material)<sup>79</sup>.

These five sources served to provide the commission with the factual information it sought<sup>80</sup> and to guide

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<sup>79</sup>Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, Report No. 14, p. 3.

<sup>80</sup>See: Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, Report No. 1, pp. 58-71.

it in the its selection of problems for concentrated study<sup>81</sup>. As well, the forums, conferences, briefs, and hearings, organized to tap people and officials in rural communities and provincial organizations, were useful instruments to increase public participation and communication, as will be seen below.

The commission divided its principal source of information - the "general public" - into two parts: (1) people and groups in rural communities and (2) people and officials in provincial organizations. This was necessary because of the different roles they play in the process of rural improvement. Rural communities, which provided the first source of information, have been the centre of social change. Individuals in the rural communities experienced the socio-economic changes that had led to the creation of the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life. Accordingly they developed specific views of the problems occasioned by those changes<sup>82</sup>. Some of the members and officials in provincial organizations (both voluntary and provincial bodies, including departments and agencies of the provincial government and the University of Saskatchewan), who offered the second source of

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., pp. 19-21 and pp. 84-88.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid, p. 25.

information, had the same experiences. In addition, they also played an important role in the implementation of policies and programmes. The Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life stated in this connection

Frequently those who lead in voluntary organizations and government also lead in the communities. For these and other reasons, organizations and government may be described as the "gatekeepers" of rural progress. [Only] few significant rural improvements on a province-wide basis can proceed without having first "cleared" through the network of agencies which share responsibility for seeing that improvements are effective and satisfying<sup>83</sup>.

To tap its first source of information - groups of people in rural communities - the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life used the following three methods: forums, briefs and hearings.

The commission arranged community forums in which people would meet to identify and discuss the main problems in rural life and their possible solutions. The forums were organized by what were known as "initiating" or "sponsoring committees", which were composed of members of one or several interest groups of the community in which a particular forum took place<sup>84</sup>. Since it was impossible for the Royal Commis-

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid, p. 45.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid. p.28-30.

sion on Agriculture and Rural Life to staff every forum with its own representatives, it used the help of Saskatchewan Wheat Pool fieldmen and agricultural representatives of the Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture<sup>85</sup> to initiate and carry out the forums. These community consultants were especially prepared for their task in a four-day workshop<sup>86</sup>.

With the support of the media, the community consultants, and the initiating or sponsoring committees, the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life was able to hold 95 community forums with a total estimated attendance of 8170 people<sup>87</sup>. The commission took special precaution to insure that the forums were representative of rural conditions throughout Saskatchewan. The locations of the forums are indicated in the following map.

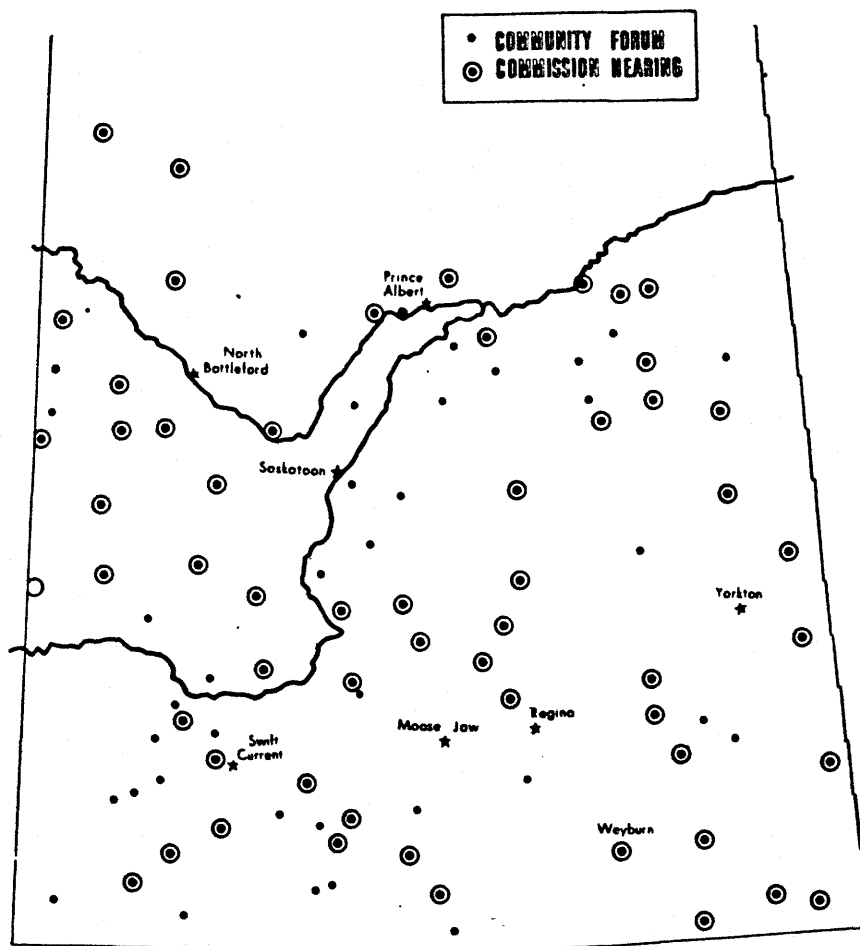
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<sup>85</sup>For more information on the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool fieldmen, see, Fairbairn and for more information on the agricultural representatives of the Department of Agriculture, see, Archer, p. 270.

<sup>86</sup>Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, Report No. 1, p. 27.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

Map 1: Location of Community Forums and Hearings



Source: Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, Report No. 1, p. 29

The key elements of the forums were discussion groups of six to twelve people. The discussion results of these small groups formed the basis for a community brief, which addressed the five main problems identified by the participants of the forum and the suggested solutions. The community briefs were written by a selected committee and approved by all participants in the last forum meeting. Furthermore, each individual had the possibility to write a minority brief.

Besides the community forums arranged by the commission, several interest groups - in particular the Saskatchewan Farmers' Union and the Homemakers' Club - organized their own meetings in their local branches to discuss rural problems. The total number of meetings organized by these organizations was 566, with 8918 participants <sup>88</sup>. All briefs from the community forums and from the meetings of these interest groups were submitted for consideration to the royal commission. The research staff of the commission analyzed the briefs and identified the main categories of problems as well as the solutions suggested by the participants in the forums. After the commission got its first impressions about the public opinion with the help of this information, it organized 57 public hearings in

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

the various communities that had already participated in the community forums<sup>89</sup>. The hearings were arranged to open direct communication lines between the community and the commission. In contrast to the forums, during the hearings the people had the opportunity to explain their views directly to the commissioners. Moreover, the hearings enabled the commission to question the people on details and implications of their proposals<sup>90</sup>.

The community forums not only gave the participating individuals the opportunity to discuss problems related to agriculture and rural life on a broad basis, they also contributed to developing a public consciousness of those problems. This is indicated by the fact that after the forums, local interest groups were created in various communities to deal with the problems identified in the forums. Moreover, the community briefs and hearings enabled the participating individuals to report their views to the commission and to influence its further investigation and recommendations. All the information gathered during the forums and hearings was used to select the areas for intensive

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>90</sup>Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, Report No. 1, pp. 25-41.

research and provided basic material for the preparation of reports <sup>91</sup>.

The huge public interest, as well as the broad support of various interest groups, can be attributed to the early engagement of the media, and to the two provincial conferences held in Saskatoon and Regina one month after the creation of the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life. These provincial conferences were carried out

(1) to determine the role organizations could play in the investigation, (2) to obtain guidance from organizations on the problems that should be studied, and (3) to obtain support from provincial organizations for community activities relating to the investigation<sup>92</sup>.

Furthermore these conferences helped develop communication lines between the 303 representatives of 167 provincial organizations and agencies who attended the conferences in Regina and in Saskatoon. In addition, they gave the representatives the possibility to exchange their different points of view about problems related to rural improvement. Thus the main purpose of the conferences was to sensitize members of provincial organizations to the problems related to the commis-

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., pp. 84-88.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 46.



sion's task. The Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life wanted to secure the support of these organizations as transmission lines - to implement the commission's goals during the investigation, to facilitate discussion and to carry out proposed reforms. Moreover, the information gathered during the provincial conferences was used to determine the major fields of investigation<sup>93</sup>.

In addition, the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life wanted to use the provincial organizations as a particular source of information for fact gathering purposes. Therefore, they invited the organizations to record their particular viewpoints in provincial briefs. Furthermore, the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life organized hearings with provincial organizations to get a better understanding of the different viewpoints of these organizations and to determine the role these organizations might play in the process of improving agriculture and rural life<sup>94</sup>.

It has been argued that a main function of a royal commission is to initiate public participation and

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., pp. 84-88.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 48-58.

communication. The Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life provides a model of how media and provincial organizations can be used to fulfil those purposes. In addition, it demonstrates how the public may be integrated into the investigations and how public opinions can be used to determine the major fields of commission study.

The Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life did not restrict itself to increasing public participation and communication during the flow of its investigation. It also set benchmarks for future royal commissions on how to promote participation and communication after the original study is completed.

After its first reports were submitted, the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life organized meetings with representatives of different interest groups to discuss the first five reports and to encourage the representatives to sponsor forums for community study of the reports<sup>95</sup>. Furthermore, those commissioners who were members of different interest groups tried to motivate their fellow members to read

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<sup>95</sup>See, (Regina) Leader Post, January 6th, 1956, p.6.

and discuss the reports<sup>96</sup>. These efforts were supported by a relatively broad newspaper coverage of the commissions continuing activities<sup>97</sup>.

Besides initiating forums for community studies, the commission organized a provincial conference on rural planning and development which was held in Regina from December 10 to 12, 1957. Participants at this conference were members of voluntary organizations in the province and representatives of the University of Saskatchewan and provincial and local governments. This conference was organized to facilitate the "normal processes of discussion and debate out of which better policies and programs are shaped in a democratic society"<sup>98</sup>.

It is customary to think that the task of every royal commission ends with the submission of its final report. Yet, with this conference and the community study forums, the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life introduced a unique way of encouraging

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<sup>96</sup>See, (Regina) Leader Post, January 12, 1956, p. 13.

<sup>97</sup>See, (Regina) Leader Post and (Saskatoon) Star Phoenix from September 1955 to December 1957.

<sup>98</sup>Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, Report No. 14, p. 74.

further productive discussion after its principal task was completed. The commissioners themselves took the stand and asked the people to criticize their proceedings and to contest their findings<sup>99</sup>. By doing this the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life broke new ground and showed again how to use the old instrument of a royal commission not only as an advisory organization but also as an instrument to increase discussion and communication among the members of the public and between them and the "gatekeepers" of society.

In summary, the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life set a standard of how to use investigative techniques - such as forums, briefs, hearings and conferences - to gather information, to determine fields of investigation, to involve the public in the investigatory process and to stimulate discussion among members of the public about the issues raised during the investigation.

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<sup>99</sup>See, Western Producer, December 26, 1957, p. 6.

## 6. Conclusion

The Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life set an example of how to use royal commissions as an instrument to increase public participation and communication on problems of a recurring character. It pointed out that in addition to scholarly knowledge and expert knowledge, communication between different interests in the society is essential for the solution of recurring problems. Moreover, the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life showed that in addition to their traditional role as advisory organization, royal commissions can have an important function in stimulating the communication process.

Through a well directed use of the media on the one hand (see above chapter 4) and the inclusion of interest groups in the investigation process on the other hand, the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life successfully stimulated an interest in the public for the issues under investigation. By doing this, it met one of the major prerequisites for encouraging the participation of the public. Furthermore, it demonstrated how to use contacts with interest groups and their resources to undertake a broad investigation.

By including media, interest groups, provincial organizations and the public, in general, as active

participants in the investigation, the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life also tried to encourage public interest in the outcome of the investigation and in the implementation of policies concerning agriculture and rural life.

The significant role played by the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life in stimulating public participation and communication suggests that it is an over-simplification to view royal commissions in general as advisory organizations only.

The primary measure of success of a royal commissions is usually the quality of its report. This indicator might be sufficient when judging royal commissions dealing with a unique, non-recurring problem, because this type of problem is so specialized that the need for public participation is of subordinate significance. But the above mentioned indicator is not sufficient to judge royal commissions dealing with recurring, complex problems - the solution of this type of problem requires expert and scholarly knowledge on the one hand and public participation, including extensive exchange of ideas, on the other hand.

Thus the impact and success of royal commissions dealing with recurring problems has to be judged by the quality of their report and at the same time also by their ability to encourage public participation and

communication in connection with the issues under investigation.

Customarily one of the most popular indices for judging the quality of the royal commission reports is the degree to which governments adopt their recommendations. But this measure reveals little about the real impact of a particular royal commission on the "solution" of a recurring problem.

The Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, for example, produced 296 recommendations. Some of them inspired the CCF government to implement the "Agricultural Machinery Act" (1958), the Family Farm Improvement Act (1960) and the Crop Insurance Act (1960)<sup>100</sup>. But it would certainly not do justice to the work of the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life and its impact on agriculture and rural life in Saskatchewan to take into consideration only the proportion of its total number of recommendations which led to legislation.

One of the most important influences of the commission consisted in the broadening of public consciousness about problems related to agriculture and rural life. The royal commission itself stated as much:

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<sup>100</sup>Rand Dyck, Provincial Politics in Canada (Scarborough 1986), p. 413.

The commission has at no time made any claim to final wisdom. It believes the value of the investigation will be judged finally, not by the speed by which recommendations are adopted, but rather the willingness of people - as individuals, in communities, in organizations, in government - to study this analysis of the world in which they live and work, and to seek ways of arriving at democratic decisions for rural improvement based on better understanding<sup>101</sup>.

Probably because of the difficulty of measuring the impact of royal commissions on public consciousness and policies, this aspect often falls flat in the assessment of the success and value of royal commissions. However, it is not surprising that critics who use the adoption rate of recommendations as their exclusive standard of value characterize royal commissions as too expensive or as job creation schemes for unemployed social scientists.

Arguably, it is more reasonable or informative to evaluate royal commissions that deal with recurring problems in comparison to the other alternatives instruments available for seeking solutions to these problems - permanent advisory institutes at universities and elsewhere, or government bureaucracies. In

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<sup>101</sup>Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, Report No. 14, p. 4.



addition to the disadvantages of bureaucracies<sup>102</sup> (inflexibility and limited perception of problems) and of permanent advisory institutes<sup>103</sup> (often too specialized to deal with complex problems), these institutions show further disadvantages, vis-a-vis royal commissions, in terms of stimulation of public participation and communication.

Certainly it is no problem for bureaucracies to establish a relationship with the representatives of interest groups in their area of jurisdiction, but it is far more difficult for them to use the resources of interest groups for their own investigations and to establish communication lines with the public in general.

Permanent advisory institutes have similar problems stimulating public discussion. It is even more difficult for them to use interest groups to encourage public concern about problems related to the issues under investigation. Even if permanent institutions organized public forums and hearings, they lack the experience and the personal contacts with interest groups activists. However, royal commissions, in which

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<sup>102</sup>See, pp. 5-6 of this thesis.

<sup>103</sup>See, p. 12 of this thesis.

leading representatives of different affected interest groups act as commissioners, have the possibility to fall back on the resources of these organizations, as well as on those of other interest groups, and to use them as transmission lines to implement the commission's goals during the investigations, to stimulate discussion and to carry out proposed reforms.

Thus it can be said that royal commissions are valuable instruments to deal with recurring problems, as long as they are not used only in their traditional capacity as advisory organizations but instead are employed as instruments to increase public participation and communication. Nonetheless, the following question remains open: why has no other royal commission in Saskatchewan up to the present day employed the model successfully developed and implemented by the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life?

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